

Little Gull

Record Number: 92-22

23 Apr 1992

Classification: A-P

Pottawattamie Co., IA

*Babs Padelford, *B. J Rose

IBL 62:77, 63:69, AB 46:430, P-0334

DOCUMENTATIONS

B. J. Rose, 14937 "N" St., Omaha, NE 68137 (6/30/93)

Babs Padelford, 1405 Little John Rd., Bellevue, NE 68005 (6/30/93)

PHOTOGRAPHS

B. J. Rose, P-0334

REFERENCES

Field Reports: IBL 62:77

Photo: Am. Birds 46:430, 1992

Records Committee: IBL 63:69

Padelford, B. 1999. Little Gull in Pottawattamie County. Iowa Bird Life 69:40.

VOTE: 6 A-P, 1 A-D

A-P, Great photos showing dark underwing.

A-D, Diagnostic photos of adult breeding bird. Clearly shows red legs, black head (with abbreviated hood) and charcoal gray under wings.

A-P, Excellent, definitive photographs! Very good details for Little Gull provided in documentations.

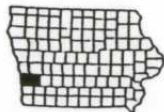
(BFH), South Sioux City, NE; Ann M. Johnson (AMJ), Norwalk; Thomas N. Johnson (TNJ), Mystic; Jack Jones (JJ), Sioux City; Matthew C. Kenne (MCK), Algona; Thomas H. Kent (THK), Iowa City; Darwin Koenig (DK); Paullina; *Ellen S. Montgomery (ESM), Mason City; Mark Orsag (MOr), Crete, NE; Michael D. Overton (MDO), Ames; Babs K. Padelford (BKP), Bellevue, NE; Loren J. Padelford (LJP), Bellevue, NE; Marietta A. Petersen (MAP), Walnut; Diane C. Porter (DCP), Fairfield; Beth Proescholdt (BPr), Liscomb; Mark Proescholdt (MPr), Liscomb; Lee A. Schoenewe (LAS), Spencer; Jim Sinclair (JSi), Indianola; Tom Stone (TSt), Waterloo; Ed Thelen (ETH), Spirit Lake; John Van Dyk (JV), Sioux Center; Phil J. Walsh (PJW), Des Moines; Jan L. Walter (JLW), Mason City; and Hank Zaletel (HZ), Nevada.

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LITTLE GULL IN POTTAWATTAMIE COUNTY

BABS PADELDFORD

On 23 April 1992 at about 2:15 p.m., B.J. Rose and I were birding along a gravel road east of Interstate 29 near the MidAmerican power plant in Pottawattamie County. A snowfall of the night before was melting, and some of the fields were flooded. We approached a wet field south of a farmstead where we saw many gulls. There were approximately 30 Bonaparte's Gulls and also many Franklin's Gulls flying around and swimming in the flooded areas.



B.J. spotted the Little Gull in alternate plumage by the dark underwing linings as it was flying nearby. It was very much smaller and paler than the Franklin's Gulls, and noticeably smaller and paler than the Bonaparte's Gulls. The head was all black and the hood extended farther down the nape of the neck than the hood of the Bonaparte's. The eye was all dark. Compared to the Bonaparte's Gulls, the black bill was shorter and thinner, the head was smaller, and the neck shorter.

The mantle was a washed-out gray color. There was not much contrast between the mantle and the white neck and tail. When the bird was sitting, the dorsal primaries looked white in contrast to the black primaries that could be seen on the Bonaparte's wings. In flight, the upper wings were a uniform pale gray with a narrow white edging. Underneath, the wings were a charcoal gray. The tail was entirely white. The legs were bright red and short, rather like a tern.

The bird spent most of the time swimming in the flooded area of the field. When the other gulls flew, it would fly up with them and land again in the water. On one occasion it walked up onto a horizontal stick and we could observe the leg color.

We observed the bird from approximately 75-100 feet for about two minutes. The remainder of the time, it was from 100 feet to 300 yards distant.

After about 45 minutes, we left the area to call other local birders. We returned about ten minutes later, to find that the Little Gull and many of the Bonaparte's Gulls had departed.

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A MYSTERY FLYCATCHER

MATTHEW C. KENNE

One of the great things about birding is that there are new things to be learned and experienced every day about even the most common birds. However, it is frustrating when you find out that you don't always know what you thought you knew. For instance: How do you identify a Willow Flycatcher in Iowa in summer? The answer: Sometimes you don't!



I was driving along the auto-tour route at Union Slough National Wildlife Refuge at about 10:00 a.m. on 26 July 1998 when through my open window I heard the song of an Alder Flycatcher. Alder Flycatchers are rarely seen in summer in Iowa as their nesting range extends north from central Minnesota, so I left my vehicle to investigate. The habitat wasn't quite right, but maybe I could document breeding in Iowa?

At first, I only heard a Willow Flycatcher sing nearby. Then I heard an Alder sing from the same thicket. Then a Willow sang from exactly the same thicket! Then an Alder sang from exactly the same bird! Fritz'-bew and Free-beer' alternated for about 10 minutes while I watched this flycatcher and scratched my head. Thoroughly perplexed, but believing the bird to be a Willow Flycatcher singing an aberrant song type, I left.

I don't hear Alder Flycatchers every spring, but I do have tapes. And several Willow Flycatchers nest at Union Slough every year, so I know what these birds are supposed to sound like. It just wasn't fair! This bothered me for about 20 minutes, so I drove back and got out my Peterson tapes. I played Alder, I played Willow, but nobody sang... The flycatcher that flitted around from perch to perch called the "whit" of the Willow and refused to play my game.

At home, I looked into mimics, birds learning wrong songs, and research done on Traill's Flycatchers (the species name for Willow and Alder flycatchers before they were split). I found that one of the studies that helped split Traill's Flycatcher into the two species involved switching eggs between nests before hatching. It showed that the young birds sang the song of their genetic parents and not the foster ones. Thus the songs and calls are innate for these species.

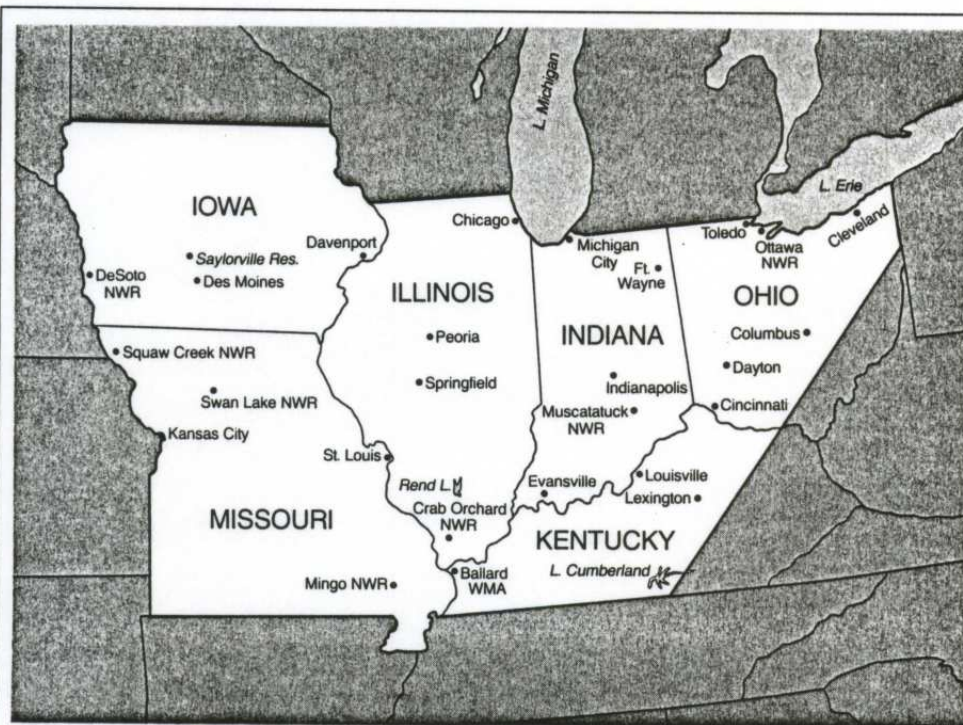
Rarely, others have reported one species singing the other's song. Possible explanations include a "dawn song" of the Willow Flycatcher that sounds very similar to the Alder song, and that both species have slightly variable two- and three-syllable songs that are unfamiliar to many. For example, the second Willow Flycatcher song on my Peterson tape sounds almost like three syllables and similar to an Alder song. Even the supposedly definitive call notes are now being questioned (the whits and keps are still good, but watch out for those beeps).

One topic that I didn't pursue is that of hybridization. I have no idea how a supposed hybrid's genetics would sort out song type. I've never seen Stein's 1963 paper that proposed splitting Traill's Flycatcher, but I assume it examined the interbreeding (or lack thereof) in the area of overlap and determined it minimal. As Union Slough isn't in that zone, and there is no way to prove or disprove this bird's identification or parentage, such speculation is interesting but ultimately baseless.

In the end, I still believe the bird I heard to be a Willow Flycatcher singing an aberrant song. But some days, as you well know, empiric species is as good as it gets!

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only in the western states, where peak counts were 30 at L. Manawa, IA, Apr. 24 (BP) and 14 at Maryville sewage lagoons, MO, Apr. 23 (DE). Willets were scarce throughout the Region; the largest single count was 41 at Maryville, MO, Apr. 23 (DE). Notable Whimbrel sightings included 15 at Illinois Beach State Pk. May 31 (BE) and an early arrival at Riverton W.M.A., IA, Apr. 24 (†BPr). The Region's only Long-billed Curlew was seen May 9 at S.C.R. (†CFh, DM). Hudsonian Godwits were not reported e. of Illinois; the only large accumulation consisted of 159 at Riverton W.M.A., IA, May 13 (MP). Marbled Godwits were widely distributed, with a maximum of 16 occurring in Spfld., Apr. 22 (DB). The easternmost record was a singleton at Salamonie Res., IN, May 2 (SAS). Ruddy Turnstones were widespread but the only sizeable accumulation

to Brookville Res., for the 3rd consecutive year. An American Swallow-tailed Kite appeared at Cedar Falls May 14-15 (†KM, †FM) providing the first Iowa report in 60 years. Another was seen in Stone, MO, Apr. 11 (†JB). Mississippi Kites continue their expansion—they were recorded in every state except Ohio. The largest accumulation consisted of a migrant flock of 17 birds in Union, IL, May 30 (MD *et al.*). Stragglers wandered as far n. as Cedar Falls, IA, where one was seen May 16 (†TK), and the Indiana Dunes, where an adult provided the 2nd local record Apr. 23 (†CF, †BJ). Reports of single N. Goshawks came from all states except Kentucky. A major movement of Swainson's Hawks occurred Apr. 19 in Cherokee, IA, with separate counts of 167 (DBi) and 218 (MB) birds. A lingering Rough-legged Hawk was documented May 24 in Winneshiek, IA, establishing a new late departure date for that state (RC). Golden Eagles were reported in every state except Illinois. Noteworthy records included an immature Golden Eagle in Pike, OH, Apr. 17 (†DMi) and an adult that remained in n.e. Cerro Gordo, IA, until May 10, establishing a new late departure date. Reports on Merlin were quite encouraging with multiple sightings from most states. Peregrines, many believed to be released birds, were reported from all states. Prairie Falcons were recorded in Union, IL, Mar. 20 (†TF, JD) and Lakin Slough, IA, Apr. 24 (†EA, EA).

Single Yellow Rails were detected at Danville, IL, Apr. 11 & 19 (†RC, †SB), Otter Creek, IA, Apr. 20 (BPr), Sangchris, IL, May 3 (DB), and Powderhorn L., IL, May 10 (JN). Two Black Rails were observed at leisure n. of Des Moines, IA, Apr. 26 (†BM, DK) for the



Adult Little Gull south of Council Bluffs, Iowa, on April 23, 1992. Photograph/B. J. Rose.

Region's only report. Several correspondents deemed Virginia Rail and Sora numbers below normal. Common Moorhen reports were disturbing; the Region's largest count was only eight birds at L. Cal. May 9 (WM). The Sandhill Crane population continues to expand. Counts of 1000 Mar. 24 at Wolf L., IN (*fide* JBo), and 500 in Harvey, IL, Mar. 28 (WS) were recorded as migrating flocks circumnavigated at the s. end of L. Michigan.

SHOREBIRDS

The Region's only sizable Lesser Golden-Plover count was 2600, in Savoy, IL, Apr. 25 (RC). Good Semipalmated Plover counts were made at Rend L., IL, where 201 were found May 15 (TF), and at Runnels, IA, where 150 were tallied May 14 (TK). A ♂ Snowy Plover was seen at Riverton W.M.A., IA, May 10-12 (†DR, †BR, †TKet *al.* ph.). Seven Piping Plovers occurred at the I.P.L. ponds in Portawattamie, IA, May 26 (BP) and one was at Conneaut, OH, Apr. 25-26 (RH, LR ph.). Singletons were also reported from 4 Illinois locations Apr. 25-May 6. Single Black-necked Stilts were reported at Riverton W.M.A. May 12 (†AJ, †TK *et al.* ph.) and in Chicago, IL, Apr. 22 (†DJ). American Avocets appeared

was 27 at Crane Cr., OH, May 31 (TL). The largest Red Knot tally was six at Chicago, IL, May 25-26 (RHu, m.ob.). Two at Riverton W.M.A., May 13 constituted only the 2nd spring record for Iowa (†TK, †JF).

The highest Sanderling count, 11 at Arcola, IL, May 30-31 (RC, RW), came from an inland site, rather than the Great Lakes. Although Semipalmated Sandpipers were reported in all states, the only unusually large accumulation consisted of 4000 seen at Riverton W.M.A. May 23 (TK). An early W. Sandpiper was recorded in Spfld., Apr. 16 (DB). Least Sandpipers were scarce, with only one count above 100 birds. White-rumped Sandpipers were reported in every state except Kentucky, but large numbers occurred only at S.C.R. where 320 were found May 18 (DE *et al.*), and at Riverton W.M.A. where 100 were counted May 31 (TK). Baird's Sandpipers wandered as far e. as Chicago where three were counted May 1 (DJ). The largest single count consisted of 100 at Riverton W.M.A., IA, Apr. 12 (TK). Sizable Pectoral Sandpiper counts were recorded at Riverton W.M.A.: 1500 May 13 (TK) and several thousand reported at Otter Slough W.M.A., MO, Mar. 26 (BRe). By far the largest Dunlin count was the 750 birds seen in Ottawa, OH, May 16 (LR).

Outside of S.C.R., where 69 were found May 18 (MR, PMc, DE), Stilt Sandpiper reports consisted of singletons or pairs from Illinois, Iowa, and Kentucky. Single Buff-breasted Sandpipers were reported at 3 Iowa locations: e. of Riverton W.M.A. May 10 (DR), at Riverton W.M.A. May 13 (TK), and at Coralville Res. May 25 (†DPi, TK). A ♀ Ruff was present in w. DuPage, IL, Apr. 25-30 (JM, ph. m.ob.). Dowitchers were in short supply



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ne. of IPL Ponds, Pottawatta Co
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Little Gull 92-22 P-0334
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DOCUMENTATION OF RARE BIRD SIGHTING

by B. J. Rose
14937 "N" St.
Omaha, NE 68137

Species: Little Gull

No. of birds seen: 1 Sex: Unknown Plumage: Breeding Adult

Date(s): April 23, 1992 Time bird seen: 2:15 p.m. to 2:50 p.m.

Locality: (Nearest town, county, state) : Approximately 2 miles south of Council Bluffs, Pottawattamie County, Iowa. It was about 1/2 mile north of the turn-off to the North Settling Pond of Iowa Power Plant, on the west side of highway L-31 (gravel).

Optical equipment: 10x40 Optolith binoculars and Kowa TSN-4 scope.

If photographed, copy is enclosed. 6 prints Equipment used: 35 mm Nikon w/400 mm Sigma lens with 1.4x converter.

Light conditions: Fairly bright sun.

Distance from bird: 20 - 300 yards; How measured: Estimated

Bird's behavior: The bird appeared from the south over the flooded field, in which we had been looking over the mixed flocks of Franklin's and Bonaparte's Gulls. It spent most of its time swimming in the waters of the flooded field or periodically wading across the shallow areas and walking across furrows to get to deeper water to swim in. It flew several times to various parts of the field. In one instance, all of the gulls flew to the north, in a panic flight, as if a raptor was near (we saw none). Two of the flight shots were made during the panic flight; these shots show the birds against (#5) and over the barn (#6), located at the site. In these shots the Little Gull, a Bonaparte's Gull and four Franklin's Gulls can be identifiable.

Habitat: Flooded fields.

Other observers (w/names & addresses): Babs Padelford - Bellevue, NE.

Description of bird(s): Smaller size than Bonaparte's Gull, with which it was directly compared. Wings were noticeably shorter and broader than Bonaparte's. Underside of wings were charcoal gray (#3), upper wing surface and mantle were pale gray (#4), paler than that of Bonaparte's and considerably paler than that of Franklin's Gull. Upper surface of primaries were all pale, except for the white trailing edge of the primaries and secondaries, which were white tipped. When perched or swimming, it was easily located by the pale tips of the of the shorter primaries; Bonaparte's primaries were longer and the black-tipped primaries made the primaries look blackish. The black area seen in the swimming (#1) and standing (#2) photos are the dark undersurface of the opposite wing. The hood of the Little Gull extended well down on the hind-neck; the hood of Bonaparte's extends only to the back of the head. The bill was thin and black. The legs were bright orange-red and short; reminiscent of those of a tern.

Description of calls or sounds, and method of delivery: None heard.

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Similar species and how eliminated: Bonaparte's Gull is larger with longer, black-tipped primaries; has a shorter hood on back of head and neck and has white underside of wings.

Prior experience with this and similar species: I have seen the Little Gull only once; at Rondeau Provincial Park in Ontario, Canada, in 1974.

This report was written from notes made during observation _____; after observation X; or

from memory _____. Date of documentation 5/3/92; Date of observation 4/23/92.

Other information:

B. J. Rose
14937 "N" St.
Omaha, NE 68137

B. J. Rose

Date 5/3/92

Babs Padelford
1405 Little John Rd.
Bellevue, NE 68005

Documentation for Little Gull

Location: Flooded field on the west side of County Rd. L-31., approximately a half mile north of the gravel road to the north IPL pond, Pottawattamie Co.

Date: April 23, 1992 Time: 2:15-2:50 p.m.

Description of Bird: A small, pale gray, black-headed gull was observed for approximately 45 minutes in a flooded field. Franklin's and Bonaparte's gulls were also present for direct comparison.

B.J. Rose spotted the Little Gull by the black wing underlinings as it was flying. It was very much smaller and paler than the Franklin's Gulls, and noticeably smaller and paler than the Bonaparte's Gulls. The head was all black & the hood extended farther down the nape of the neck than the hood of the Bonaparte's. The eye was all dark. The bill was black and was shorter & thinner than Bonaparte's. The head was smaller than Bonaparte's & the neck was shorter.

Mantle was a washed-out gray. There was not much contrast between the mantle and the white neck and tail. When sitting, the primaries looked white on the top, in contrast to the black primaries that could be seen on the Bonapartes. In flight, the upper wings were a uniform pale gray with a narrow white edging. Underneath, the wings were a blackish-charcoal gray. The tail was all white.

The legs were bright red & short, rather like a tern.

Behavior: The bird spent most of the time swimming in the flooded area of the field. When the other gulls flew, it would fly up with them, & land again in the water. On one occasion it walked up onto a horizontal stick & we could observe the legs.

Distance: It was within 75-100 feet of the road for about 2 minutes. At other times it was from 100 ft -300 yards.

Other observer: B.J. Rose - (He photographed the bird).

Optical Equipment: 25X Bushnell Spotting Scope & 10X Bausch & Lomb Elite binoculars.

This report is being written at 9 p.m. on 4/23 from notes written in the field at the time of sighting.

Babs Padelford